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Introduction. The Many Faces of Wellbeing¹

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[A] Introduction

In her novel, *Regeneration*, Pat Barker presents the following reflection on his fieldwork in the Solomon Islands by the neurologist and anthropologist, W.H.R. Rivers (1864-1922):

I thought I'd go through my usual routine, so I started asking questions. The first question was, what would you do with it if you earned or found a guinea? Would you share it, and if so who would you share it *with*? It gets their attention...and you can uncover all kinds of things about kinship structure and economic arrangements, and so on. Anyway, at the end of this.... they decided they'd turn the tables on me, and ask me the same questions. Starting with: What would *I* do with a guinea? Who would I share it with? I explained I was unmarried and that I wouldn't necessarily feel obliged to share it with anybody. They were *incredulous*. How could anybody live *like that*? And so it went on, question after question..... They were rolling round the deck by the time I'd finished. And suddenly I realized that *anything* I told them would have got the same response..... it would all have been *too bizarre*. And I suddenly saw that their reactions to my society were neither more nor less valid than mine to theirs. And do you know that was a moment of the most *amazing* freedom. I lay back and I closed my eyes and I felt as if a ton weight had been lifted.... It was the *Great White God* de-throned, I suppose. Because we did, we quite unselfconsciously

assumed we were the measure of all things. That was how we approached them. And suddenly I saw not only that we weren't the measure of all things, but that *there was no measure* (Barker 1998: 212, excerpted).

As at once a neurologist and anthropologist, W. H. R. Rivers seems ideally suited as a guide into qualitative, mixed method, intercultural research into wellbeing. This passage is redolent of the experience of wellbeing as something that 'happens' – first interactively, in the stimulation of intercultural exchange, shared conversation, laughter and insight, and second internally, in the release of being de-centred, letting go of the need to judge and assess. At the heart of the episode is Rivers' recognition of the many ways of being, with his own society no more providing a universal standard than does any other. Striking also is his sense of liberation at escaping the need to 'measure'. Finally, the sense of dislocation he describes – and embraces – may echo a common experience amongst those who research wellbeing, given the multiplicity of influences on it and the extensive range of its possible interpretations.

This book provides a distinctive collection of empirical studies of wellbeing in diverse contexts, predominantly in the global south. 'Cultures of wellbeing' refers first to diversities in social and cultural constructions of wellbeing, and the need for analysis of and dialogue between them. It further suggests that wellbeing is produced through social and cultural (including political, economic and environmental) practice. In addition, it draws attention to the distinct cultures in different traditions of research, materialised in their routinised practices, techniques and technologies, norms and assumptions, structures and social organisation, and what they hold sacred. This connects to the second major theme, that of method. The concern here is first to challenge the dominance of quantitative methods and illustrate the contribution of qualitative and mixed methods approaches to the study of wellbeing. Second, we emphasise the significance of methodology in shaping *all* accounts of wellbeing. Both culture and methods relate in turn to the third theme of place. This points to the

situated nature of both 'lay' and 'expert' understandings of wellbeing, and suggests that space and place constitute critical dimensions of wellbeing that deserve much greater attention. Finally, the underlying context of the contributions in this volume is concern for the ways that wellbeing has been, and may be, adopted as a focus in policy and practice.

As described below, there are multiple accounts of wellbeing in policy, and multiple ways in which the concepts which underlie these are construed. Atkinson (2013: 138) notes that a common response to this diversity is to argue for standardisation, an agreed set of indicators or tools which can be used for constructing authoritative accounts. Our interest in this book is rather different. While different contributors adopt different outlooks and lines of argument, as a collective the volume proposes a shift of focus away from *what wellbeing is*, to exploring *how accounts of wellbeing are produced*. We thus explore the relationships between three key elements of wellbeing research: *what* is claimed (accounts of wellbeing); *how* research is undertaken and by whom (researcher identity, cultural and disciplinary assumptions and methods of enquiry producing data and their analysis); and *where and with whom* the research takes place (place and cultural and socio-economic context) (see Figure 1). Practical challenges in generating robust data come together with differences in researchers' underlying philosophical assumptions regarding epistemology (what can be known and how can it be known, including what it means to do cross-cultural research) and ontology (what actually *is*, including conceptions of personhood and wellbeing or happiness).

Each of the chapters thus considers the ways that discipline, method, and/or local culture, socioeconomic structure and place shape constructions of wellbeing. Across the volume as a whole, the reification of wellbeing as a 'real thing' that people may 'have' is resisted. Instead, the argument is advanced that constructions of wellbeing

are intrinsically connected to the places in which they are generated and the research methods by which they are produced.

Figure 1.1: The construction of wellbeing knowledge

The framework of the book is deliberately comparative. Geographically the chapters span communities across Africa (Angola, Zambia, Ethiopia and South Africa), South and South-East Asia (Central India and Cambodia), Latin America (Venezuela, Peru and Mexico) and the UK. They draw on different disciplines, including international development, public health, anthropology, sociology and psychology. They focus on different aspects of life: health and physical activity; religion; migration; economic life; family relationships; landmine impact; and the politics of community and identity. Finally, they present and reflect on different methodological approaches, including a national survey, mixed methods, ethnography, and a variety of visual and participatory methods. The case studies are organised into two sections. The first five reflect on mixed methods approaches, the second five on qualitative methods. Together, they highlight the complementarities and tensions between quantitative and qualitative methods, issues of reliability in self-reported data, the importance of grounding questions with locally relevant examples, and the scope for person-centred approaches which allow people to talk about what is important for their own wellbeing in their own words.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is three-fold. First, it aims to locate this volume in relation to the wider field of wellbeing in policy contexts and the key concepts and methods which this involves. Second, it reflects on the key methodological terms and issues which structure these debates. Third, it introduces

the case study chapters, and describes how they relate to the broader field, and how they advance the argument of the volume as a whole.

[B] The Field of Wellbeing

The ubiquity of references to wellbeing and the diffusion of meanings they bear means any attempt to summarise the field must inspire some trepidation. What perhaps unites contemporary work on wellbeing is the conviction, expressed in many ways, that it is possible to bring wellbeing about intentionally, through a combination of will and technique. Most immediately this is seen in the multitude of publications of the ‘manage yourself, manage your life’ variety promoting self-help psychology, health, spirituality, exercise, diet and lifestyle, as a means to self-advancement. But it is also evident in public policy, as voluntary organisations, local councils, national governments and multi-lateral organisations increasingly identify the advancement of wellbeing as their stated objective, and statisticians promise new measures which can quantify ‘how people think about and experience their lives’ (OECD 2013: 3).

The diversity, volume and velocity of increase in references to wellbeing suggest a cultural tide that sweeps together a range of different interests and agendas. Its association with health and harmony holds the promise of a release from the tensions of modern life, a hope of re-balancing and revival. Its appeal to ‘science’ – predominantly statistics but more recently neuroscience - reflects the longing for authority and robust foundations for action. Politically wellbeing gives voice to desires for an alternative, a new moral economy, a counterweight to the excesses of capitalism in a world where the promise of socialism no longer seems credible. Its claim to put people’s own perspectives at the heart of policy-making promises more democratic processes, or even empowerment. Its positive charge offers a corrective to tired old problem-focused policy-making, encouraging people to express their

aspirations rather than rehearse their deprivations. Paradoxically perhaps, the stress on personal experience also fits well with the individualist ideologies of late capitalism, and their faith in the pursuit of happiness through choice in consumption.

As the paragraph above suggests, much of the energy driving the wellbeing agenda derives from the global north and those already in a position of relative material advantage. Is it simply a problem of late modernity searching for its soul, a moral reflux in societies which have gorged on excess and sought salvation through consumption? What is the value of this agenda in the global south, where people surely have more immediate, material concerns to contend with?

This is a serious question. There is without doubt a danger that countries and communities in the global South have foisted on them an inappropriate agenda derived from elsewhere, the history of international development is full of such examples (e.g. Cooper and Packard 1997; Crush ed. 1995). The chapters in this volume identify several ways in which the dominant approaches to wellbeing need to be challenged or discarded in order to understand lived experience in Asia, Africa and Latin America. There is also a danger that the South – or the East – is invoked in a nostalgic projection of ‘the good life’. Romance with ‘the world we have lost’ is as central to the self-identification of modernity and development as is the disparagement of ‘traditional societies’ (Grossberg 1996). It is precisely because of our sensitivity to such patterns of discursive dominance that we argue the need for more in-depth, qualitative studies which express what wellbeing does – and does not – mean for particular people in particular places, as a way to open up a fuller and more balanced dialogue.

The next section introduces four ‘faces’ of wellbeing in public policy. Before discussing these, however, it is necessary to consider how happiness fits in. There is no clear answer to this. Some writers talk exclusively of wellbeing, some only of

happiness, and others mix and match between the two. Across the literature as a whole, happiness generally appears as a narrower concept, a component of wellbeing, sometimes identified with ‘subjective wellbeing’ (though this fit is far from perfect or consistent, as discussed below). Happiness tends to be identified more with emotion or feelings, and with the individual, while wellbeing may include ‘objective’ elements – such as standard of living, access to health care or education – in addition to ‘subjective’ – such as satisfaction with life. Wellbeing has a more established trajectory as a shared objective for community or polity (e.g. Collard 2006). However, happiness is also applied to collectivities, as in the archetypal ‘happy family’, and initiatives like ‘Happy City’ show that happiness is not limited to applications at the individual level (<http://www.happycity.org.uk/>). In general, happiness is viewed as the more controversial concept, more ideological for its critics, more challenging of prevailing orthodoxies for its advocates. Although our primary orientation is towards wellbeing, we acknowledge that wellbeing and happiness form part of the same cultural complex. Our approach is therefore to explore the ways that different authors use the terms, rather than seeking to draw a definitive line between the two.

[A] Accounts of Wellbeing in Public Policy

This section identifies four ‘faces’ of wellbeing and happiness in public policy. The first takes a macro approach, using wellbeing to broaden the scope of issues for government attention, and specifically to move beyond a sole or primary emphasis on economic growth as the marker of progress. The second focuses on personal wellbeing, aiming to get individuals to take action to promote their own health and happiness. The third concerns the economic concept of utility, and involves using subjective measures of happiness or satisfaction to evaluate policy and programme

effectiveness. The fourth poses fundamental questions of the current political, economic and social settlements.

The boundaries between these are porous and sometimes fuzzy. The intention is not to draw hard and fast lines between them, but to offer a grid which can be used to map out some key areas of difference in this rather fluid field. The grid focuses particularly on two dimensions. First, does the approach involve subjective or objective dimensions of wellbeing? Second, does it concern the substantive content of wellbeing, or does it primarily involve using measures of wellbeing as a means to evaluate something else? Before proceeding, it is worth taking a little time to explain how I am using these terms.

The division between 'objective' and 'subjective' dimensions of wellbeing is contested, as discussed below. For the moment, though, we adopt a simple definition. 'Objective' dimensions of wellbeing are those that in principle can be verified by an external observer. Quality of housing, level of education or income would be examples. Subjective dimensions of wellbeing are those that are interior to the person him or herself – thoughts and feelings – where in principle the individual is the ultimate authority (see Gasper 2010, for a more extended discussion). In practice in social science research both kinds of data are generally gathered through self-report, either verbally or through a written or on-line survey. Both kinds of data are thus open to dissimulation, as people say they have one house when in fact they have two, or say they are happy when in fact they are sad. As discussed below and in Camfield (this volume) self-reported data are also very sensitive to the instruments that are used to collect them. This is one of the ways that the simple distinction between objective and subjective begins to unravel.

In public policy, the current interest in wellbeing takes two forms. For some, wellbeing is a substantive concern. This prompts questions like, what does wellbeing

mean to different kinds of people, what promotes or inhibits wellbeing? For others wellbeing, and specifically subjective wellbeing, is primarily of interest as a means to evaluate something else. In this approach, how happy or satisfied people say they are provides an indicator of the success of a policy or style of government. While some approaches are at one extreme and some the other, overall this difference is more a matter of emphasis than a complete contrast. A substantive concern with wellbeing may also be the basis of evaluation.

Figure 1.2 maps the four faces of wellbeing in public policy and the key concepts that underlie them on this grid of subjective-objective, substantive-evaluative axes. The darker rectangle identifies the approaches that include a subjective dimension, which are the main focus of this volume. The diagram is explained further in relation to the specific concepts and approaches in the discussion below.

Figure 1.2: Plot of wellbeing approaches in public policy

[B] Comprehensive Wellbeing

Comprehensive wellbeing is the most established approach to wellbeing in public policy. It is commonly referred to in shorthand as 'beyond GDP'. It comes at the centre of our grid of wellbeing approaches (Figure 1.2), involving both objective and subjective indicators, and being used in both evaluative and substantive ways.

Comprehensive wellbeing typically comprises three key elements. The first is breadth, the promotion of a broad range of indicators 'not just economic growth' to measure societal progress. The second is relevance, the claim that statistics should

reflect 'what really matters to people' (see Oman, this volume). The third is the increasing inclusion of subjective alongside objective elements. The Report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, better known as the Stiglitz report, which was presented to President Sarkozy of France in 2009, is an influential example. As the following quotation makes clear, the issue of measurement is key to this agenda:

Another key message, and unifying theme of the report, is that the time is ripe for our measurement system to *shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being* (Stiglitz *et al.* 2009: 12, original emphasis).

The claims of novelty notwithstanding, in fact the limitations of using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the main development indicator have long been recognised. Quality of Life (QoL) health and social indicators have been gathered since at least the 1960s (Noll 2011) with national surveys such as the Scandinavian and German welfare surveys, British *Social Trends*, and French *Données Sociales* since the 1970s.

The most influential theoretical underpinning of comprehensive accounts of wellbeing is Amartya Sen's capability approach. This has made a major contribution to placing wellbeing on the global economics and international development agenda. It has also been widely adopted in other disciplines, such as education. The concept of capability developed as a critique of measuring standards of living either by what people have (commodities) or by the pleasure or happiness they derive from these (utility) (Sen 1983). Instead, capability focuses in a more active way on the person, in terms of 'the ability to do various things by using that good or those characteristics' (Sen 1983: 160). Capabilities then occupy an intermediate space between an overly material focus on goods, income and commodities and an overly subjective focus on

happiness or satisfaction, potentially comprehending and going beyond both.

Capabilities constitute 'the alternative combinations of things a person is able to be or do' (Sen 1993: 30). These 'valued functionings' – to use Sen's terms – range from the basic needs for human life, such as being adequately nourished, to more psychological and relational factors, such as 'achieving self-respect or being socially integrated' (Sen 1993: 31). Although the approach was developed in part as a reaction against the emphasis on happiness/utility in economics, Sen counts the ability to be happy amongst 'important functionings', but without pre-eminence (Sen 1993: 37). He also emphasises agency and freedom as both prerequisites for and constituents of wellbeing. These may also be in tension: Sen (2009: 290) gives the example of Gandhi's hunger strike during the struggle for Indian independence to illustrate how people may have reason to pursue goals that undermine their individual wellbeing.

While its newness may be over-stated, the inclusion of subjective indicators of life satisfaction within broader measures of comprehensive wellbeing has experienced a major upsurge. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported in 2013 that the UK, France, Italy, the United States, the Netherlands, Japan, and South Korea are following established examples like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in either measuring or planning to measure subjective wellbeing at a national level. The democratic aspiration is evident in the style, such as the informal labels on the categories of the UK Office for National Statistics' (ONS) 'Wheel of Wellbeing', which include 'Our relationships', 'What we do', and 'Where we live' (ONS 2014).

Along with the heightened profile of national wellbeing statistics there has been an increase in global indices that mix objective and subjective measures in ranking countries according to different criteria of 'progress'. The World Values Survey led the way in 1981. Intended more directly to challenge the dominance of GDP in public

policy, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched in 1990 the Human Development Index, succeeded by the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index in 2010 (Alkire and Foster 2011). Both the HDI and MPI are calculated on the basis of objective assets or achievements.

Other indices that mix objective and subjective measures of wellbeing include the new economic foundation (nef)'s 'Happy Planet Index' (2006 onwards); the OECD's Better Life Index (2011 onwards); the Legatum Institute's 'Prosperity Index' (2010 onwards); HelpAge International's Global AgeWatch Index; and the Social Progress Imperative's Social Progress Index (both launched in 2013). Although these indices appear similar to one another and draw largely on the same sources of data, they differ in the particular indicators chosen and the ways these are combined to form the domains which are used to tell the main story. Each index therefore represents a series of political choices, from the choice of issues on which to generate data, to the selection of what will be the key indicators amongst these, to the ways these indicators are combined and labelled.

[B] Personal Wellbeing

Personal wellbeing stresses behaviour change. Policies aim directly to promote individual wellbeing, assuming the individual is responsible for him or herself. The archetype here is health policy, where the public are encouraged to eat more healthily, exercise more, drink and smoke less (see Brangan, this volume).

A well-known example is the new economic foundation's widely cited 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' (Thompson *et al.* 2008). Developed with UK government funding the brief was 'to devise a set of actions that enhance an individual's personal well-being' explicitly ruling out 'actions oriented at the societal or governmental level' (Thompson *et al.* 2008: 3-4). The recommendations (Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep

Learning and Give) thus all target individual behaviour. On our grid personal wellbeing appears to the upper right, in the overlap of subjective and substantive approaches (see Figure 1.2 above).

Happiness is central to the understanding of personal wellbeing. The measurement of happiness and its promotion as a policy target are at the core of Positive Psychology, launched in the USA in 1998, with the aim of focusing on good mental health and personal strengths against the tendency to emphasise mental illness and dysfunction. In the UK, Layard (2006) has used happiness scholarship to advocate increased government spending on counselling and mental health. Over time, however, a primary focus on happiness tends to shift to a broader wellbeing agenda. Thus in 2011 Seligman published a new book, *Flourish*, which advocated a broader 'wellbeing theory' which added relationships and achievement to the elements of 'authentic happiness' he identified earlier (positive emotion, engagement, and meaning). The difference, Seligman (2011: 25) claims, is that wellbeing 'cannot exist just in your own head' but brings in objective as well as subjective dimensions: 'a combination of feeling good and having meaning, good relationships, and accomplishment'. Interestingly, for both Layard and the later Seligman, the promotion of personal wellbeing is cast as a social, not simply individual, project (see also Biswas-Diener ed. 2011). However, the strong undertow of individualism in their core disciplines of psychology and economics, means that the social is conceived primarily as contributing to individual wellbeing or (also) as the sum of individual wellbeings. The individual remains the unit of analysis.

The link between personal happiness and public policy is also being made at the international level. As the global standard-bearer for the promotion of 'Gross National Happiness' (GNH), it is the Government of Bhutan that has taken furthest. GNH has its basis in an apparently throwaway comment by the King of Bhutan in 1972, which was taken up by two Canadians and worked into a questionnaire. Both the idea and

the measures of GNH have been re-worked many times since, making it a truly 'glocal' project, which seeks to meld ecological awareness and Bhutanese 'wisdom' together with standard development and Western 'science of happiness' scholarship. 'Happiness: Towards a New Development Paradigm,' produced by 'an international expert working group' for the Government of Bhutan in December 2013, exemplifies this mix. It includes standard development concerns with living standards, health and education, alongside environmental sustainability and the values of service, interconnectedness and co-operation. Creating the right living conditions will not in itself secure wellbeing, it claims. Instead, 'the inner transformation of our own mind-sets and behaviours is as important for happiness as the transformation of these outer conditions of wellbeing' (NDP 2013: 34). It therefore includes 'happiness skills' 'drawn creatively from human historical experience, wisdom traditions, and modern science' (NDP 2013: 20) as a vital complement in 'transforming those conditions towards higher human potential' (NDP 2013: 36).

The history of GNH is in many ways indicative of the trajectory of happiness in public policy: it tends to transform into the broader 'comprehensive' face of wellbeing. This is evident in the United Nations (UN) (2011) 'happiness resolution'. Having declared itself '*Conscious* that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal' (United Nations 2011, emphasis in the original), the UN goes on to locate happiness and wellbeing in the context of 'sustainable development' and 'the need for a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach to economic growth.'

[B] Utility

A central aspect of the excitement around measures of subjective wellbeing in policy circles is the promise that they offer a direct indicator of utility, which can be used as a measure of policy or programme effectiveness. In Figure 1.2 it thus appears to the

lower right, in the overlap between subjective and evaluative approaches. The OECD statistics office provides a strong example, though it is careful to stress that subjective indicators should not replace, but can ‘complement other measures’ (OECD 2013: 36). The OECD (2013: 36) explains:

being grounded in peoples’ [sic] experiences and judgements on multiple aspects of their life [sic], measures of subjective well-being are uniquely placed to provide information on the net impact of changes in social and economic conditions on the perceived well-being of respondents.

There are two aspects to this claim. The first is that SWB can provide a direct link to the real effect of a policy on people’s experience, so one can evaluate not just whether a policy has achieved its aims, but what this has meant for people’s happiness or quality of life. The second is that SWB can provide a single, composite impact measure by which policy makers can compare the relative effect of different kinds of intervention such as health versus housing, or inflation versus unemployment. According to the OECD (2013: 37-43), SWB can aid policy evaluation, helping for example in cost-benefit analyses to assign a value to life events such as marriage, divorce, or unemployment and can be used to predict behaviour, such as the Arab spring² or employees’ likelihood of seeking alternative employment. In addition, they claim, it can help guide individual decision-making, giving people better information on what will actually make them happier, as against what they perhaps erroneously believe will do so.

The argument of this volume raises considerable doubt as to whether such claims are credible. At this point, however, what is important to recognise is the frame that enables them to appear so. This derives from the totemic place that the notion of ‘utility’ occupies in economics. The pre-eminence of utility, or the happiness or satisfaction that people derive from their needs or desires being met, dates back at

least as far as Bentham's classic utilitarian formula that pronounced the good to be 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number.' The difficulty was that no direct measure of utility was available, and philosophical objections were raised to the notion of comparing levels of utility between different people (Collard 2006). As a result, in their search for robust, 'objective' measures of utility economists have widely adopted proxies such as 'revealed preferences', which focus on the choices people actually make (Samuelson 1938). At their simplest, such proxies assume that utility can be measured in terms of what people are willing to pay for particular goods or services. Crudely speaking, the higher the prices paid, the greater the utility that is revealed. Since wealthier people can satisfy a greater range of higher value preferences, this means logically that the utility (or satisfaction, or happiness) that they can derive should be greater than that of poorer people. Wealthier countries (i.e. those with higher Gross Domestic Product – (GDP)³) should similarly be able to satisfy more needs and desires and so provide a higher level of utility to their citizens.

Graduated response scales as direct subjective measures of happiness and satisfaction seem first to have been used in a study of women's sex lives in 1920 (Angner 2011: 6). Happiness and satisfaction questions have appeared since 1930 in educational psychology and 1960 in studies of mental health (Angner 2011). By the 1960s some data was available that showed life satisfaction on a national basis. The assumption that rises in GDP would lead to increased happiness could thus be tested. The results both confirmed and confounded previous expectations (Easterlin 1974). As predicted, within a given country wealthier people tended to report themselves happier than did those who were poorer. But across countries differences in average levels of wealth were much smaller than those by economic status within countries, and there was not the same clear association between happiness and wealth overall (Easterlin 1974: 106; 108). In addition, within a country

– the United States – increased GDP per capita over time did not correspond with rising levels of happiness. Rather, Easterlin (1974: 121) argued, ‘the growth process itself engenders ever-growing wants’ which in turn become drivers of further growth into the future.

The ‘Easterlin paradox’ sparked a major debate that evolved into a new sub-discipline, ‘the economics of happiness’. While the form of the debate is technical, involving the statistical manipulation of national datasets, its core is moral and political, with SWB standing for utility as a definition of the good. Some contributors use Easterlin’s findings to argue that life is more than money, to advocate happiness as a policy target and urge going ‘beyond GDP’ as described above. Other scholars dispute Easterlin’s findings and/or extend the focus to consider how happiness is affected by other issues such as ‘freedom’, provision of state welfare, human rights or levels of inequality (e.g. Veenhoven 2000; Alesina *et al.* 2004; Rothstein 2010). There remains considerable controversy about the results. Carol Graham (2011: 16–21) suggests that this derives substantially from differences in the methods employed: the sources of data; the questions used; the countries surveyed; and the measure of income used; as well as ‘real’ differences such as rates of economic change and changing aspirations. There are also more fundamental conceptual and methodological questions about the mapping of subjective wellbeing at a national scale. These include whether it makes sense to map ‘real’ GDP figures against constructs of (fixed end) happiness scales, which by definition cannot continue to rise. Methodological issues are discussed further in the section on subjective wellbeing below.

[B] Development Alternative

The fourth face of happiness and wellbeing in public policy poses an alternative set of values. At a minimum this questions what is 'good growth', suggesting the economy should be developed only in ways that serve human fulfilment and are environmentally sustainable. Stronger versions argue that what matters is not economic growth but economic sufficiency. More political versions emphasise social justice and may sponsor some form of solidarity economy, involving smaller, self-managed units of production with egalitarian forms of management and an orientation towards fair trade and environmental sustainability. More personal versions emphasise quality of life in the home and community and may counsel disengagement and self-reliance. There are many forms of each and many initiatives which combine both aspects. Religious motivation is quite common. In Figure 1.2 this approach appears at the upper centre. It considers wellbeing in substantive terms and tends to dissolve the distinction between subjective and objective.

Worldviews of indigenous (or 'fourth world') peoples have been very important in inspiring visions of an alternative to 'business as usual' capitalist development. While these are diverse and polyvocal (Fabricant 2013) they tend to have various underlying orientations in common. These include an emphasis on oneness, with humanity as part of nature and social relations intertwined with the natural environment. For some in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia, this goes as far as rejecting the nature/culture divide and seeking to include 'earth-beings', such as mountains, as persons with rights to political inclusion (De La Cadena 2010). The orientations also tend to be systemic, cyclical or reciprocal rather than linear, and they typically emphasise place and particularity rather than aspiring for 'global' universality (see Davies, this volume). This can lead to some very radical and challenging assertions about the locatedness of knowledge. Rasmussen and Akulukjuk (2009) for example, contrast the way that Inuit learn environmental knowledge experientially with English-

language patterns of learning which detach students from their environment, and ask:

Shouldn't environmental studies at universities be teaching the languages and epistemologies of the people Indigenous to the particular biocultural region under study? (Rasmussen and Akulukjuk 2009: 286)

It is in Latin America that indigenous views of wellbeing have achieved the greatest political influence. Most widely known as *buen vivir*, which is translated as 'living well together'⁴ representations of indigenous cosmologies have given form to rights-based struggles against the dominance of traditional political elites, the United States, and neo-liberal capitalism. In Ecuador and Bolivia they have been officially recognised and incorporated in new national constitutions (see Rodriguez, this volume). In theory at least this means new attention is paid to the claims of the natural world and environmental sustainability, there is political acceptance of the need for greater redistribution and state welfare programmes, and recognition is given to the collective rights of marginalised peoples to inclusion within a pluri-cultural and pluri-national state (Radcliffe 2011). The translation into practice is complex. The economies of both Ecuador and Bolivia remain heavily dependent on mining, oil or gas extraction with high environmental costs. There are also different views of what it means to 'live well together' between and within indigenous groups (Artaraz and Calestani 2014; Loera-González, and Rodriguez, this volume). There are serious conflicts of interest between people by geographical location and occupation, and between policies in prioritising protecting the environment or financing social welfare or providing water and sanitation to the urban poor (Fabricant 2013). And for any country it is not clear how far a radically different economic model can be implemented, given high levels of need in the population, daily political challenges in reforming state structures and the power of global economic structures and relationships (Radcliffe 2011).

[B] Summing up

This section has presented four different ‘faces’ of happiness and wellbeing in public policy. In practice, as noted above, the distinctions between these approaches are not clear-cut. Encouragement towards greater personal wellbeing frequently appeals to the same visions of wholeness and harmony that animate alternative development approaches. Measures of national progress that go ‘beyond GDP’ increasingly include subjective wellbeing alongside indicators of health and education. Strong advocacy of happiness tends to morph over time into a broader concern with personal or comprehensive wellbeing. This fluidity and porosity between different understandings of happiness and wellbeing can be seen as both a strength – linking back to a common core motivation – and a weakness – the terms lack clarity and definition. Part of the explanation for this permeability is that the different faces of wellbeing draw on a common fund of concepts. The next section discusses the most prominent of these.

[A] Key Concepts: Psychological and Subjective Wellbeing, and Happiness

This section introduces the two concepts that underlie much of the promotion of happiness and subjective dimensions of wellbeing in public policy: subjective wellbeing and psychological wellbeing. The lack of fixity within the field means that there is not a perfect match between concept and application, but there is nonetheless a predominant association that can be discerned between subjective wellbeing and utility, and personal and psychological wellbeing. The section closes with a critical reflection on happiness as a project of the self.

[B] Subjective wellbeing

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) is the predominant approach to measuring happiness and wellbeing in contemporary public policy. While it may be incorporated within accounts of personal and of comprehensive wellbeing, its core orientation is towards utility. The great attraction is its slimness, or parsimony, as it assesses the level of pleasure, happiness or satisfaction rather than its substantive content. Subjective wellbeing thus asks simply ‘how happy’ people are, it does not concern itself with how that happiness is defined or what its basis might be.

SWB is not only conceptually light, it is the most methodologically straightforward approach to apply. At its simplest, it may be measured through a single question asking people how happy they are with their lives as a whole. While the term ‘happy’ may be used, such questions more precisely concern life satisfaction. For greater reliability, a number of items may be combined. Examples include Diener *et al.*’s (1985) five item ‘Satisfaction with Life Scale’ (SWLS)⁵ and the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) of satisfaction across eight life domains (International Wellbeing Group

2006).⁶ The Gallup World Poll (launched in 2005) provides the most influential source of data on subjective wellbeing in public policy at present. This asks people to locate their lives now and where they expect to be in five years' time on a ladder on which rung number 10 is the 'best possible life for you' and 0 is 'the worst possible life for you' (Gallup n.d.).⁷

Although these are all measures of life satisfaction, they are not all the same. Attention in the SWLS is on the self and individual aspirations. The PWI includes subjective assessments of 'objective' factors – standard of living, health, personal relationships, safety etc. There is also a substantive difference between the interior-oriented exercise of reflecting on one's own happiness, and the exterior-oriented exercise of ranking one's life against other possible lives. While these differences may seem matters of detail, they can significantly affect results. Gallup's approach is the one that correlates most closely with income, both across individuals and across countries. This leads Kahneman and Deaton (2010: 16492) to suggest it is the 'purest' measure. I would argue, instead, that the 'ladder of life' encourages people to think of their lives in economic terms.⁸ The heat generated by the 'Easterlin paradox' indicates the political sensitivity of questioning the association between economic growth and human happiness. It is thus a matter of concern that the favoured measure of life satisfaction is the one that has the strongest in-built bias towards an economic frame.

Amongst psychologists, SWB is often construed as a composite of (cognitive) life satisfaction and (affective) 'affect balance', or the extent to which people experience positive versus negative emotions (e.g. Diener 2000). Emotion-based assessments of happiness correlate much less closely with economic status than does life satisfaction (e.g. Diener *et al.* 2010; Graham 2011). Means of assessing emotions span the methodological spectrum, from asking people to describe the emotional content of various episodes in their lives; through counting the frequency of emotions

classified as 'positive' and 'negative' over a given period (e.g. Watson *et al.* 1988); to 'experience sampling' which seeks to capture immediate ratings of emotions as they are experienced (e.g. Larson and Csikszentmihalyi 1983); to observation of frequency of smiling (Nettle 2005); to brain imaging (e.g. Berridge and Kringelbach 2011). Stiglitz *et al.* (2009: 147) identify experience sampling as the 'gold standard' in measuring hedonic experience.⁹ This is based on the logic that 'true' accounts of emotions are given at the time of the experience, recall and reflection distorts. This may be disputed, of course, as it assumes feelings are simple and transparent to the self and discounts the human activity of 'needing to make sense of' emotions. Such attempts to control for 'subject effects', leading ultimately to faith in external observation of facial or brain activity, reflect I believe, an existential anxiety generated for quantitative researchers working with a positivist epistemology on subjective data – they need to try and make it objective. I discuss this point further in the section on 'constructing wellbeing knowledge' below.

Cross-cultural analysis of SWB also reveals some cultural differences in how people assign scores. Diener *et al.* (2000), for example find that (white) Americans tend to give higher average scores than do East Asians, particularly when it comes to 'global' life satisfaction, as opposed to domain specific measures. The authors relate this to a 'positivity disposition' which varies between cultures. Others might attribute it instead to differences in the strength of the ideology of happiness and positivity on the one hand, and norms of modesty or self-deprecation on the other (see e.g. Held 2002; Ahmed 2010). Whatever the diagnosis, it clearly shows that SWB scoring is not culture-neutral, but influenced by social norms and values.

While SWB's focus purely on self assessment may bring an attractive simplicity, it is also subject to significant conceptual critique. The first is that what gives you pleasure may not be good for you, so the notion of wellbeing should include not just what feels good (at the time) but what *is* good in some intrinsic way. This rehearses

debates that go back to the ancient Greeks about hedonic (pleasure-oriented) versus 'eudaemonic' (virtue or fulfilment) views of the good life. In my view this critique is misdirected. We simply do not know the basis on which people rate their 'happiness' in life, except when the measures are quite narrowly focused on emotion or affect. For 'global happiness' or life satisfaction questions it is at least as likely that people are basing their ratings on eudaemonic as hedonic criteria. Somewhat ironically for the measure which has put happiness on the global policy agenda, the 'happiness' of SWB has no substantive content: it functions simply as a marker of subjective success in life.

The second critique concerns the use of SWB in policy. This is the 'happy peasant' issue – that people may state that they are happy even in very grim circumstances, making happiness a very equivocal indicator. Sen (1983: 160) suggests one aspect of this as he states that poor people's expressions of happiness may simply reflect 'a cheerful disposition'. Also, as Ehrenreich (2009: 170) amongst many others points out, in contexts of inequality emphasising satisfaction carries an inherently conservative weighting. High satisfaction may signify the low aspiration of internalised oppression, rather than the experience of positive fulfilment many people identify with happiness. This issue of adaptation also throws into question the practical use of SWB measures in project or policy evaluation. Adaptation concerns the way frames of reference shift with altered circumstances, meaning that objectively higher standards of living will not necessarily be reflected in increased levels of satisfaction, or vice versa (see Clark ed. 2012).

A third critique questions the robustness of data on subjective wellbeing. This suggests that apparently global 'satisfaction with life' responses may be heavily influenced by contextual factors, such as the happen-chance of mood, the weather or an immediate 'feel-good' trigger like finding a coin on the photocopier just before being asked about life satisfaction (Schwarz and Clore 1983). The common response

to such objections is that with a large enough sample such effects will be evened out. But what if the 'framing' effect is provided by the questionnaire itself? In a paper suggestively subtitled, 'How the questions shape the answers,' Schwarz (1999) suggests that there is an intrinsic relationship between the instruments used to gather self-reported data and the information they produce (see also Camfield this volume). Drawing on a wide range of research in psychology, Schwarz (1999: 93) argues:

Unfortunately, self-reports are a fallible source of data, and minor changes in question wording, question format, or question context can result in major changes in the obtained results.

For satisfaction measures, people need to bring to mind not just the object itself – such as one's marriage, in the case of marital satisfaction – but also a standard against which to evaluate this (Schwarz 1999: 100). Deaton's (2012) study of levels of subjective wellbeing in the United States during the economic crisis of 2008 to 2010 provides evidence of this. He found that the effect of the economic crisis on SWB, even at its worst, was 'dwarfed' by the effect of changes in the order in which questions were asked (in particular shifting questions about politics to just before questions on life evaluation) (Deaton 2012: 23). While this issue is typically discussed in terms of technique and reliability, it has a more interesting conceptual dimension, as it points to the essentially relational and situated character of subjective data.

There is also the danger of manipulation of SWB measures if they come to be seen as politically significant. Frey and Gallus (2013: 207) thus caution against the political pitfalls of adopting a happiness index as a key measure of government success, warning:

the Index will be systematically distorted due to the incentive for citizens to answer strategically and the incentive for government to manipulate the Index in its favour.

This again raises epistemological issues. In drawing attention to the fact that these data are produced by knowing subjects who might have an interest in a particular kind of result, it calls into question claims of 'happiness science', that invoke a natural science paradigm where data is simply available to direct observation and not affected by the fact of being observed. These issues concerning the underlying philosophical assumptions of this research are discussed further below.

The final point concerns what kind of subject is being construed in subjective wellbeing. There seems an underlying – probably unconscious – motif of the market as the model of society. This is perhaps why subjective wellbeing surveys look so similar to market research: they can be seen to position people as consumers rating their satisfaction, with their lives as the item to be consumed. Ironically, despite SWB's stress on the individual, the person as subject who judges or feels is ultimately dissolved. The data are the 'choices', feelings or perceptions registered as scores, detachable and detached. This objectification of subjective data through breaking its relationship to the perceiving subject, is a necessary preliminary before quantitative analysis. The chapters that follow show some of the interesting results that emerge when qualitative research enable that relationship to be restored (e.g. Camfield, Brangan, White and Jha this volume). Here, the main point to note is that subjective wellbeing may not be as light or culture-free as it appears: it comes with its own underlying set of values and view of the person and how it should be construed.

[B] Psychological Wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing (PWB) links most closely with the personal face of wellbeing in policy contexts. Its underlying model of wellbeing is organic, evoking notions of health, in either literal or metaphorical terms. The close connections between health and wellbeing are strikingly evident in the World Health Organisation's (1946) definition:

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.¹⁰

Scholars of psychological wellbeing are committed to a 'eudaemonic' approach which sees wellbeing in terms of functioning and fulfilment and a life well lived. Ryff (1989: 1070) thus draws attention to 'the important distinction between the gratification of right desires and wrong desires.' Her six domains of psychological wellbeing¹¹ aim to bring a longer history of humanistic psychology to bear on empirical investigation and clinical application (Ryff 1989; Ryff and Keyes 1995).¹² Ryan and Deci (2001) consider that psychological wellbeing results from the achievement of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They thus recognise SWB as one possible indicator of positive psychological health, but only one. More importantly 'assessments of self-actualization, vitality, and mental health... assess well-being conceived of as healthy, congruent and vital functioning' (Ryan and Deci 2001:147).

There is no single authorised scale for SDT, but a range of questionnaires developed for different purposes. Ryff's full questionnaire has 84 items (14 per domain) but this can also be reduced to nine items per domain.¹³ By contrast, the 'Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale' (WEMWBS) comprises just 14 questions (or seven in the short version) about mood, energy and cognitive functioning. As a framework this does not reflect the same ambitions to theorise wellbeing but instead comes closer to

a conventional, diagnostic understanding of mental health, with a more positive spin. This perhaps reflects its origins in a partnership with the Scottish National Health Service (Tennant *et al.* 2007).

The main critiques of Psychological Wellbeing approaches concern their claims to universality. Ryff is highly vulnerable here, as both her characterisation of the domains and the items to test them are steeped in the values of North American culture. They thus reward strong statements of individualism – ‘I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important’; control – ‘In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live; continuous personal growth – ‘I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world’; openness in relationships ‘I find it difficult to really open up when I talk with others’¹⁴; actively pursuing one’s own sense of purpose in life – ‘I am an active person in carrying out the plans I set for myself’; and positive self-assessment: ‘I like most aspects of my personality.’

While Ryan and Deci have worked hard to maintain that their three psychological needs are indeed universal, SDT similarly rests on a strong, liberal humanist, universalist model of human being:

people’s happiness and well-being are inseparable from their experience of personal and motivational autonomy in pursuing freely chosen life-goals, actions, and behaviors. We consider this axiom to be universal and applicable to people from all cultural communities.... The feeling of autonomy and self-determination is what makes us most fully human and thus most able to lead deeply satisfying lives – lives that are meaningful and constructive – perhaps the only lives that are worth living. (Chirkov *et al.* 2011:1)

The SDT argument for cross-cultural applicability rests on their definition of autonomy, which is argued to be quite distinct from independence, and so not tied to more individualist cultural settings. The opposite of autonomy, SDT theorists argue, is heteronomy, or being denied choice by another. If one personally identifies with the values of one's group and therefore chooses to follow them, this constitutes the exercise of autonomy. Miller *et al.* (2011) have tested this with matching sets of North Americans and Hindus in India and confirm both that choice or autonomy is important for satisfaction and that people can experience a sense of choice in contexts where they also feel a sense of duty – doing their duty can be felt to be a positive experience. Reflecting the importance of close attention to routinised practices, however, Miller *et al.* (2011:58) point to problematic coding in widely used SDT questionnaires. These interpret references to duty as indicating an absence of choice or autonomy, and so implicitly identify autonomy with individualism, against the stated views of SDT theorists.

Psychological wellbeing also faces an important political critique. Ahmed (2010: 12) sounds a caution about the notions of 'higher' and 'lower' forms of wellbeing which are characteristic of eudaemonic approaches. These are highly vulnerable to class, ethnicity and gender bias, such that 'hierarchies of happiness may correspond to social hierarchies.'

[B] Questioning Happiness

As noted above, Sen has presented a consistent and trenchant critique of promoting happiness as the goal of development policy (e.g. Sen 1983; 1993; 2009) and others have recently reinforced this (Nussbaum 2012; Stewart 2014). As described already, in practice this does not seem as serious a concern as it might appear – even approaches that begin with happiness have a strong tendency to shift into a broader

concern with wellbeing. In this section, therefore, I take a different tack, and consider criticisms of the promotion of happiness as an ideology of the self.

As already remarked, it has long been recognised that statements of happiness cannot stand in any simple way as evidence of having a good life. Some people are by nature happier and/or more content than others. Some religious and cultural scripts countenance acceptance of one's lot in life, while others value struggle and striving. Some cultures reward modesty and temperance in expressions of self, others positivity and self-affirmation. People adjust expectations upwards and downwards according to what they experience. This may have quite contradictory consequences. On the one hand it may result in the 'hedonic treadmill' (Brickman and Campbell 1971) where nothing is ever enough. On the other it may lead to acceptance of inequality or oppression as natural or inescapable, or more positively, to an ability to make the best of very difficult circumstances.

The prevalence of these options is not simply random or a matter of idiosyncratic choice, but is rooted in – and contributes to – culture and political economy. The generation of inexhaustible desire is one of the engines driving the global capitalism of late modernity. This is expressed not only in the 'need' for ever expanded material consumption, but also in the way that the self comes to be viewed as itself a project to be worked on and re-worked over time, with an underlying promise of perfectibility (Craib 1994). Craib links this to the dominance of the market as a metaphor that governs how we think about social life (see also Sahlins 1976¹⁵). I note above that an implicit idiom of the market seems to underlie the concept and practice of SWB. Working in a market, Craib (1994:30) points out, requires a certain kind of personal "front", one that 'does not acknowledge what might be thought of as "defects" in the product.' This has implications for the representation of self through subjective wellbeing indicators, discussed in the next section.

Ehrenreich (2009) presents an example of how happiness narratives can be used to discipline individuals' expression of self, in her polemic against the dominance of positive thinking in the USA. In a particularly powerful chapter she reflects on her own diagnosis of breast cancer, the way it provided a new merchandising opportunity with a plethora of teddy bears and pink bows, and the policing of her emotional response to it. Her expression of anger on a website brought rebuke from other women living with breast cancer. The 'healthy' response to cancer, and the only acceptable response, was to look for the positives, 'for her own sake', and with the (sometimes explicit) implication that negative thinking could inhibit cure, or even be responsible for the cancer having developed in the first place. This emphasis on personal responsibility for (in this case physical) wellbeing is a very strong theme within 'personal wellbeing', as described above. Ehrenreich sees her experience as an encounter with 'an ideological force in American culture' 'that encourages us to deny reality, submit cheerfully to misfortune, and blame only ourselves for our fate' (Ehrenreich 2009:44). Sointu (2005) emphasises the public policy effect: that the increasing stress on personal responsibility for 'one's own wellbeing' may be linked to the retrenchment of the state and the removal of statutory welfare provision.

Ahmed (2010) contrasts the repeated emphasis on happiness as the object of desire with its ineffability, suggesting that happiness may simply stand as marker for desire itself:

If happiness is what we wish for, it does not mean we know what we wish for in wishing for happiness. Happiness might even conjure its own wish. Or happiness might keep its place as a wish by its failure to be given. (Ahmed 2010: 1)

If, as she goes on to remark a few pages later, 'Where we find happiness teaches us what we value' (Ahmed 2010: 13), the variability in views of happiness and wellbeing

described in this volume should not surprise us: it directly reflects the different values and orientations of the commentators. Accordingly, Ahmed lays a powerful emphasis on the ideological character of happiness and the way it can serve to re-inscribe mainstream values and identities. Referring to bodies of feminist and anti-racist scholarship that have de-constructed notions of 'the happy housewife' and 'the happy slave', she points to the 'unhappy aspects of happiness'. These are the ways it can legitimise dominant social institutions and the forms of subordination they embody, as 'happiness is used to redescribe social norms as social goods' (Ahmed 2010: 2).

Craib's analysis speaks strongly to the promotion of happiness and subjective wellbeing, despite not addressing it directly. In Craib's view, the self of late modernity is a false self, its alienation obscured by the stress on individual autonomy:

My argument is that late modernity produces a fragmented and isolated self and a fragmentation of our experience of ourselves; this is masked with a vision of the omnipotent self-constructing self which maintains many of the phantasies of infancy into adult life. (Craib 1994: 166)

Drawing on his work as both social theorist and psychotherapist, Craib (1994) suggests that a major aspect of the human condition is the encounter with limits and the inevitability of disappointment. Reflecting on the optimism and future orientation of both psychology and sociology, Craib (1994: viii) suggests:

The first duty of the human sciences is perhaps to hold on to both sides of the equation: that life can be good and made better, and that life ends in the ultimate disappointment of death.

Craib's emphasis on the importance of adjusting to the limitations of life is strongly echoed in many cultural scripts across place and time. Jackson (2011: 61-62) provides one example, in his description of what wellbeing means amongst the Kuranko people of Sierra Leone:

For Kuranko, it is how one bears the burden of life that matters, how one endures the situation in which one finds oneself thrown. Well-being is therefore less a reflection on whether or not one has realized one's hopes than a matter of learning how to live within limits. Singing, like Sira, on an empty belly.

[A] Constructing Wellbeing Knowledge

Underlying the various accounts of wellbeing are significant differences in views of the research process, and indeed the world that it represents. Considered more closely, the straightforward contrasts between objective and subjective, qualitative and quantitative, paradoxically appear both much less clear-cut and more heavily loaded with differing sets of philosophical baggage. One of the strengths of mixed methods enquiries is that they force (sometimes painful) reflection on personal investments in what counts as data and as theory, how analysis is done, how goals are defined, what techniques are employed, how the relationship between researcher and researched is understood, and what is held as sacred and beyond question. This section maps out some of this terrain. This leads into an outline of relational wellbeing, the approach taken by most of the contributions to this volume, and an introduction to the empirical chapters that follow.

At the simplest level quantitative methods involve the generation of numbers and their statistical analysis, while qualitative typically involve words and their interpretation. Similarly, in everyday speech 'objective' means unbiased, or even true, while 'subjective' suggests biased, or even untrue. Conventional thinking tends

to see a natural fit between the quantitative and objective ('facts'), and the qualitative and subjective ('feelings' or 'meanings'). In practice things are not so straightforward. As seen above, quantitative methods predominate in wellbeing research even when the subject matter is subjective. Interview data can be analysed quantitatively, with key pieces of text or references or types of occurrence codified for comparison across cases to build a causal story. Numerical data may be analysed qualitatively, to explore what it reveals of a particular respondent or set of people (see also Camfield, Oman, Brangan, and Jha and White this volume).

More significant than types of data and techniques of analysis, are underlying differences in philosophies of research. Quantitative research tends to assume a positivist, empiricist or realist epistemology. Its paradigm of research is the natural sciences, and the independent observation of objective data. Research design involves testing a hypothesis, and is thus relatively fixed from the outset. It aims to simplify and standardise, especially through the use of numbers and measurement, reducing complex reality into a more manageable number of concepts or factors. It seeks commonality and comparability, favouring standard tools with a minimum of adaptation to context. It tends to test for linear, external relationships between variables, and ideally demonstrates causality. It aspires to science, universality, generalisation and simplicity, and puts its faith in large numbers to overcome idiosyncratic differences and reveal hidden truths.

Qualitative research, by contrast, tends to assume a constructivist, interpretivist epistemology that emphasises the social construction of meaning and the value of seeking to understand the way research subjects see their world. Research design may be exploratory and inductive, allowing considerable flexibility to respond to new discoveries as the research develops. It emphasises particularity, variability and the complex inter-relations of various factors. Its orientation is towards quality rather than quantity, description rather than measurement. It emphasises power and process and

researcher reflexivity. It aspires to depict accurately the particularities of the research context, putting its faith in rich description and in-depth analysis of specific cases.

A first step in becoming more self-conscious about the implication of methods in constructing accounts of wellbeing is to separate out the different elements involved. To explore this further we return to W. H. R. Rivers in the Solomon Islands.

From Rivers' account it can be seen that the experience of wellbeing is essentially subjective, but it can be registered by quantitative and qualitative instruments. For Rivers, it began as cognitive insight: 'I suddenly saw that their reactions to my society were neither more nor less valid than mine to theirs.' This was accompanied by physiological sensation, 'I lay back and I closed my eyes and I felt as if a ton weight had been lifted.' If the instruments had been to hand, this would no doubt have registered measurably in levels of serotonin and images of brain activity. What is important to note is that *any* representation of this experience is just that, a representation. Neither medical instruments nor verbal descriptions can convey precisely the quality of the experience in itself. Words come closest, because they come most 'naturally' – it is through words that we try to make sense of what we are feeling to ourselves. Also, words engage the imagination and it is through imagination that we can begin to enter into the experience of others. Had a subjective wellbeing researcher been present, he or she could perhaps have got Rivers to rate his feelings on a Likert scale (though I suspect Rivers would have resisted!). In this way the experience could be *translated* into quantitative terms, but it is easy to see that it is not its home language: the 'translation' would have made it into something quite unlike itself, because its texture as an *experience* would have been removed.

Undertaking such close analysis makes evident the distinctions between what happens (the experience), the instruments that record it, the data they produce, and

the techniques of analysis that are applied. To preserve this recognition, it is helpful to talk about data being generated or constructed, rather than gathered. Data is not just lying about waiting to be picked up by a passing researcher, it is produced through the labour of research. Even something as tangible as housing, for example, has to be codified before it becomes data. What will be recorded? Quality of roof, of floor, material of construction, number of rooms, presence of outdoor space, tenure status.....? There are always decisions about what variables matter, always marginal empirical examples which are difficult to classify.

The larger point this reveals is that research is a social process. Two aspects of this are noted above: Schwarz's (1999) work on the way questionnaires shape responses, and Frey and Gallus' (2013) concern about the political manipulation of happiness scores if they are seen as significant markers of government success. A further dimension is the self-consciousness of respondents. This is recognised in psychology as 'social desirability bias', that people tend to give the responses that they think will make them look good. As Ahmed (2010: 5) points out, if happiness is what everyone wants, then to be asked how happy you are is a very loaded question. How you answer can affect not only how others see you, but also how you see yourself, and perhaps even how you feel. Each year I get my students to take one of the many subjective wellbeing tests available on-line. Invariably the de-briefing involves several people saying how they wanted to go back and change their answers, 'because I am a very positive person and I didn't feel that the results I got reflected that.' These are on-line surveys where the results are visible only to the individual. The extent to which we nonetheless regulate our responses shows the weight that rating our happiness carries in our performance of self (Goffman 1959) – with ourselves in the front row, even if there is no-one else in the audience.

While it is clearly mistaken simply to identify quantitative research with objective data and qualitative with subjective, there is nonetheless a discernible association that

derives from their techniques and epistemologies. The stress on social construction in qualitative methods, the emphasis on the meanings carried even by the tangible and material, tends to give even the most concrete observation a certain subjective character. Many qualitative researchers, myself included, find it hard to refer to objective wellbeing without placing 'objective' in quotation marks. As Sahlins (1976: 168) puts it:

No society can live on miracles... None can fail to provide for the biological continuity of the population in determining it culturally....Yet men do not merely "survive". They survive in a definite way.

Conversely, the logic of quantitative methodologies is to objectify their data, breaking the link to their subjects, discarding as unhelpful noise the specificities of cultural or personal meanings. The yen of quantitative researchers towards the objective, even though their material is subjective, shows in the search for external indicators of emotional states. This is what seems to underlie the OECD's (2013:41) claim that measures of SWB can transcend the limits of people's own understanding, revealing the inner truth of how people are *really* doing, even beyond their 'conscious' thoughts and feelings.

Most importantly, measures of subjective well-being provide information on the actual impact of an initiative on the respondent's subjective well-being, rather than the impact that the respondent consciously identifies (OECD 2013:41).

Perhaps most obviously, the longing for the objective amongst quantitative researchers of subjective wellbeing is expressed in the repeated claims that there is now a 'science of happiness' (e.g. Diener 2000; Layard 2006; Graham 2011).

[B] Towards a Relational View of Wellbeing

Relational wellbeing is an emergent concept that provides some major challenges to the dominant conceptions of wellbeing and the ways these have been mobilised in policy. It is the concept that underlies the positioning of wellbeing – or ‘living well together’ – as a political alternative to development. Rather than economics or psychology, relational wellbeing is framed by sociological, anthropological or geographical perspectives and is primarily qualitative in orientation. While it has yet to be categorised definitively, it can be discerned from the convergence of views of a number of scholars working quite independently. As such there are many trends that are shared and some that have been developed by one specific scholar or group of scholars. This book is intended as a contribution to the advancement of relational wellbeing into a more robust and widely used concept.

The starting point of relational wellbeing is that notions of wellbeing are seen as socially and culturally constructed, rooted in a particular time and place (Atkinson *et al.* 2012). This makes it critical not to assume a ‘universal’ approach, but to investigate how wellbeing is understood by the people who are the subjects of research (see e.g. Mathews and Izquierdo 2008; Jimenez 2008; Jackson 2011; Thin 2012; Atkinson *et al.* 2012; Calestani 2013; Fischer 2014). In the majority of cases these ‘local’ concepts are relational in a second sense. Wellbeing is not seen as the property of individuals but as something that belongs to and emerges through relationships with others (Christopher 1999). This is particularly evident in studies outside the West, where people tend to lay greater emphasis on collective identities and relationships of (often unequal) reciprocity. Jackson (2011: 59) in his study of the Kuranko people in Sierra Leone expresses this clearly in a passage commenting on Sen’s capability approach:

Because human existence is nothing if not *social and ethical*, fulfilment does not lie solely in our freedom “to lead the kind of life [we have] reason to value”; it consists in our capacity to realize ourselves in relation to others.

While cultural forms clearly differ, it is worth noting that this sense of ‘being-in-relationship’ is also found in many of the everyday ways that ordinary people in the West talk about wellbeing, which are quite different to the abstracted and individualised approaches of much wellbeing scholarship.

In Figure 1.2, relational wellbeing appears in the upper centre area of the diagram, showing its interest in wellbeing is substantive, and it exists in the overlap between objective and subjective approaches. It is important to recognise how it differs from subjective and psychological wellbeing. Scholars of subjective and psychological wellbeing also recognise the importance of material sufficiency and security and good relationships for an individual’s wellbeing, but they envisage this primarily in exterior terms, with wellbeing itself defined as intra-psychic. Thus economic or relational status might be calculated as an independent variable, having an *effect on* subjective or psychological wellbeing as the dependent variable (see also Ramirez forthcoming, White and Ramirez, Jha and White, this volume). In relational wellbeing, material, relational and subjective dimensions are seen as mutually imbricated and co-constituting (see Gough and McGregor 2007; White 2010). As White (2010) explains, the rice which is emblematic of Bangladeshi conceptions of wellbeing is thus not simply a source of calories, but is a condensed symbol of community – those you eat with and those you do not – love, identity, nourishment, entitlement and belonging. As in the quotation from Sahlins above, when seen like this simple oppositions between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ wellbeing begin to dissolve.

A further aspect of relational wellbeing which distinguishes it from the other concepts is its stress on wellbeing as process. This perhaps remains to be fully explored, and

appears in a number of different forms. One is attention to life-course, and the way that current understandings of wellbeing incorporate both reflections on the past and expectations of the future (White 2002; Lloyd-Sherlock and Locke 2008; Huovinen and Blackmore plus Rodriguez, this volume). Another is to frame wellbeing as something that *happens* rather than a set state. An example would be the analysis of Rivers' experience in the Solomon Islands, which opens this chapter. A third approach is to emphasise the dynamic inter-relations between different components of wellbeing. McGregor (2007: 337) for example characterises wellbeing processes as 'involving the interplay over time of: goals formulated, resources deployed, goals and needs met, and the degree of satisfaction in their achievement.' Davies (this volume) stresses the iterative and systemic character of relations between people and the environment, in her notion of 'wellbeing ecology'. Fourth, seeing wellbeing as process helps to recognise how (personal) wellbeing is increasingly invoked in self-management, or – as suggested above – implicated in the performance of self (Atkinson 2013: 140-141; Ahmed 2010). Atkinson (2013) presents the most radical approach, in which wellbeing is detached from individualised subjects and inheres instead in assemblages of relationships amongst people and places and material objects and intangible aspects of places (such as atmosphere).¹⁶ Wellbeing thus becomes profoundly situated and relational, located in 'the movement and clusterings of affect' that emerge at particular conjunctions of time and place (Atkinson 2013: 142).

Its awareness of complexity and emphasis on the social context may make relational wellbeing seem less 'policy-ready' than some other formulations. In fact, however, there are a number of ways in which relational wellbeing has clear practical implications.

Atkinson (2013: 139) suggests that the very fact that there is no precise or generally acceptable definition of wellbeing makes it valuable as a process tool. She describes

how the process of discussing wellbeing, and the variability of concepts that this involved, was itself useful in formulating goals for local government action. This is one of the main ways that Wellbeing Wales used their 'sustainable wellbeing toolbox' (Thomas 2014). The reflections of other Non-Governmental Organisations' (NGOs) on their use of tools for wellbeing and quality of life assessment similarly place a strong emphasis on the value of debate and discussion (White with Abeyasekera ed. 2014).

A relational wellbeing perspective also provides the grounds for policy critique. While there is much to be said for a wellbeing approach in policy, there is clearly the danger that it becomes simply the performance of a public relations exercise, aimed at galvanising support through its 'people-friendly' form for established agendas and routines of policy practice. More concerningly, Ehrenreich's account of her experience of cancer shows that wellbeing narratives may be co-opted for very personal and invasive disciplining of the self. Addressing such issues is a political task, and cannot be achieved through conceptual means alone. Nevertheless, the social and material grounding of relational wellbeing approaches provide them with better means to critique and resist. The primarily technical and empiricist orientation of psychological and subjective wellbeing make them much more vulnerable to capture.

Brangan (this volume) states as follows the main policy message that arises from her research:

Those interested in promoting health and preventing non-communicable diseases need to look upstream and beyond the sphere of health to consider how to create conditions conducive to the broader wellbeing within which health will more easily flourish.

While this reflects the immediate focus of her work in health, its general message of the need to look ‘upstream’ and beyond the specific policy focus summarises a theme that is common to many of the chapters presented in this book. This illustrates how the division drawn above between ‘substantive’ and ‘evaluative’ eventually breaks down: an evaluative tool that will result in improvements in policy and practice must ultimately be based in substantive understanding of the lives of the target population.

Atkinson (2013: 142) sums up as follows the ultimate implication for policy of relational wellbeing:

A shift is demanded away from how to enhance the resources for wellbeing centred on individual acquisition and towards attending to the social, material and spatially situated relationships through which individual and collective wellbeing are effected.

[B] Looking Forward

The case study chapters begin with Camfield’s consideration of what can be learned by mixing qualitative with quantitative methods in developing wellbeing surveys. This opens with a broad review of the limitations of self-reported data, which provides an important frame of reference for subsequent chapters. Camfield then reflects on two of her own experiences of using mixing methods: cognitive de-briefing in which respondents are asked to describe what they were thinking as they responded to a survey; and the creation of a taxonomy to guide quantitative analysis, based on open-ended interviews and participatory group activities. She argues that mixing methods in this way brings greater recognition of the value of qualitative approaches to policy. The two contexts in which these pieces of research took place were, respectively, a study of the skills of young entrepreneurs in South Africa; and the

pathways of poverty and child wellbeing amongst children and their households in rural Ethiopia. With regards to the framework set out above, the studies combine a comprehensive approach to wellbeing with a relational concept of wellbeing. In terms of Figure 1.1 the chapter thus suggests that the combination of multiple baselines linking method and context will lead ultimately to a more robust account of wellbeing. At the same time, each of these lines might perhaps be shown as intermittent, since combining methods makes clear that all data are socially constructed, and so helps to dissolve the notion that there is a strict divide between 'objective' and 'subjective'. Camfield closes with a caution that not all of the tensions between qualitative and quantitative accounts of wellbeing can be resolved through technical solutions, implying that different methods can produce different and non-commensurate accounts of wellbeing. She also suggests that SWB data should be handled cautiously until more is understood about how people interpret the questions they are asked, especially in the global south.

Chapter three addresses the politics of wellbeing methodologies, with Oman's analysis of the UK Office of National Statistics (ONS) debate *Measuring National Well-being: 'What Matters to You?'* which took place from November 2010 to April 2011. With regards to the framework in Figure 1.1, the survey reflects comprehensive wellbeing. Oman contrasts the inclusive rhetoric of the debate with the way that qualitative, free text fields in the survey were largely ignored, resulting in exclusive reliance on quantitative data analysis in the interpretation of results. She points to many ways that politics can inhere in the exigencies of procedures (such as coding too quickly), or routines of practice, such as retro-fitting answers to already established codes and using qualitative statements merely to 'illustrate' points that have been determined through other methods, or even pre-date the research. Expertise within research teams also has political implications, resulting in some kinds of data

and analysis being privileged from the start. The way data was stored for example, which did not allow for the retrieval of individual respondents' answers, indicates that this was not conceived as a fully mixed method project.

Oman argues that the political position of the ONS combined with their strong bias towards quantitative expertise led them systematically either to ignore, or misinterpret, most of what participants writing in the free-text fields were hoping to convey. Her own discourse analysis of these data demonstrate that the content comprised both political critique, and a more relational understanding of wellbeing. In this case the second point of the triangle in Figure 1.1 (where and with whom: context) is virtually collapsed into the first as the combination of the institutional position of the ONS (the 'who') and its strong bias towards statistical analysis (the 'how') significantly over-determined the account of wellbeing that the 'debate' could produce.

Chapter four, by Brangan, explores what qualitative methods can add to quantitative surveys, as she contrasts the universalising constructs of so-called 'health behaviours' with the ways in which people managed food and physical exercise in their everyday lives. The 'where and with whom' this time is a largely black township in Cape Town, South Africa. The main characters in the 'who and how' are Brangan and her research assistant, using ethnography and semi-structured qualitative interviews. In the background are public health professionals who had undertaken a quantitative epidemiological study of 'health behaviour' and non-communicable diseases with the same respondents. Far from being hostile to Brangan's perspective, they were eager to hear about work and recognised their own was missing something. In some instances the qualitative data help explain some apparent anomalies in the quantitative. In others the two forms of data present very different profiles of the individuals involved. The overall model here is personal

wellbeing, informed strongly by a public health, bio-medical perspective. Into this Brangan brings a relational wellbeing perspective. This emphasises how the material and social context significantly construct the 'choices' that people are able to exercise. Like Camfield, Brangan finds that her interviewees' interpretation of questions about life satisfaction inverts the normal expectations. Like Eyber (see below), she finds that religion is of great significance to how people talk and think about wellbeing. In terms of policy implications the message is clear: understanding people's own perspectives and the interplay of material, relational and subjective dimensions within them is critical to the design of an effective and appropriate health policy design.

White and Ramirez's chapter, number five, explores the importance of the economic within subjective dimensions of wellbeing. It presents data from Chiawa, Zambia, where men and women villagers were subjects both of a predominantly quantitative survey and of more in-depth, life history interviews. The research as a whole took a comprehensive approach to wellbeing, looking across a range of factors such as health and educational status and provision, livelihoods, and subjective dimensions of wellbeing. A new, relational concept of 'inner wellbeing' was produced. In this case two very different approaches of statistical and discourse analysis reinforce each other in emphasising the importance of economic perspectives. Quantitative analysis shows that within inner wellbeing it is the economic domain that is most strongly associated with happiness. Objective economic status also has a significant effect on subjective and inner wellbeing scores. Qualitative analysis shows how economic capacity plays a central role in (male) gender identities and ways that people emphasise reciprocity and the *moral* dimensions of the economy. It also shows how people use economic references as an expressive idiom in speaking of the self.. Taken together, therefore, both qualitative and quantitative evidence suggest the need for adjustment in the account of wellbeing, from the psychological subject

generally assumed by much wellbeing research, to one that gives greater weight to the economic dimensions of subjectivity.

In chapter six, Jha and White present data from the same overall project as chapter five, but this time from Chhattisgarh, central India. The focus is on women, and discussion of close relationships. The authors describe the challenges they encountered in developing a quantitative measure of wellbeing in family relationships, and the difference between the high scores given in response to direct survey questions and much less positive qualitative accounts. They relate this to ideologies of the 'happy family' which make people feel they should project a positive image whatever their actual experience. The chapter demonstrates how understandings of wellbeing are place-specific, in that for some women at least, the family household was a place where strength was expressed in staying silent, rather than speech. This is in contrast to general assumptions that identify wellbeing with self-expression and close relationships with the sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings. In addition to the survey data, the chapter presents in-depth case studies of two unusually empowered women. These develop understandings of wellbeing as process, as they demonstrate how women's management and negotiation of relationships play a significant part in its active construction day by day.

The second section of the case studies is dedicated to qualitative methods. In chapter seven Huovinen and Blackmore describe the centrality of relationships to the wellbeing of people in the midst of geographical mobility in Peru. Place emerges as a key theme through which people structure their life stories. The research location is a shantytown in Lima, Peru. Semi-structured interviews through which people narrated their 'mobility stories' are the main research instrument. As in other chapters, gender emerges as a key factor structuring people's responsibilities within, and capacities to maintain, relationships. As with Jha and White, the in-depth interviews provide evidence of the complexity and ambivalence of relationships and

the ways they shift over time. In some ways Huovinen and Blackmore's emphasis on the importance of affect chimes with the psychological subject of dominant wellbeing discourses. Where they differ, however, is in representing relationality as central to their subjects' constitution of self, rather than seeing them as free-standing individuals to whom relationships might be attached. Huovinen and Blackmore also make clear that the experience of affect takes particular cultural forms in different places. They identify in particular two key concepts that are central to the Peruvian elaboration of relational wellbeing in contexts of mobility. The first is 'relational anchoring', which describes how key relationships are built and re-worked over distance and time. The second is *pena*, which describes the acute sadness and longing for what is lost. In contrast to Jha and White's findings of Indian women choosing to keep their sorrows to themselves, Huovinen and Blackmore show how in Peru people's expression of *pena* may mobilise others to provide support.

Eyber's chapter (number eight) takes as its thematic focus religion in the context of psychosocial interventions addressing personal wellbeing. The location is Angola in 2000, during a period of armed conflict. As with Oman, and to some extent Brangan, the main argument concerns what is missed due to the professional blinkers of the main actors charged with wellbeing, in this case the mental health and psychosocial support workers. Eyber initially shared these blinkers, but her methods of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions forced her to recognise and see beyond them. In terms of accounts of wellbeing, the key message is that professional investments can prevent (in this case religious) dimensions from being acknowledged. As psychosocial approaches were already positioned as 'less rigorous' than the 'hard sciences', acknowledging religion could have jeopardised workers' hard-won and still somewhat fragile professional status. They were also not sure what to do with religion, if it were acknowledged. The irony is that the religious discourses in many ways mirror those in personal wellbeing, as they emphasise

individual responsibility ('many people are sick because of their sins') and the need for personal action for change. With regards to wider policy implications, Eyber makes the interesting suggestion that accounts of wellbeing need to be assessed not for their 'truth' but according to what other accounts they silence or exclude, or what alternatives they enable to flourish.

In Chapter nine Davies describes how participatory photography enabled villagers in a mine-affected part of Cambodia to reveal many different interconnecting levels of what wellbeing meant to them. This indicates an often forgotten aspect of dominance in research methods: that of the spoken word. Davies' analysis points to the limits of the verbal – people may experience wellbeing, but may not label it as such or analyse it in such abstract terms. It may also be something, quite simply, that is difficult to put into words. Another important dimension of this approach is that it passed the initiative to villagers to set the agenda of discussions, as they chose what to photograph and then sorted through the pictures in advance of the interview, to decide which they would talk about and what they wanted say. The accounts of wellbeing that emerged were multi-relational, interweaving past, present, and future, the changing environment and sense of space, family, food and above all, land. This again points to the difficulty of separating objective and subjective, or indeed material, relational and subjective. It also substantiates the argument above that accounts of relational wellbeing must configure a process: it happens in motion, not stasis.

The last two chapters reflect the face of wellbeing as an alternative to development. They report research with indigenous peoples in Mexico and Venezuela respectively, whose community identities are intertwined with the articulation of a distinctive vision of wellbeing. They thus point to the politicisation of indigenous notions of 'living well

together', or *buen vivir*, in Latin America more generally. But they also show that what it means to live well is not a settled cultural script, but a matter of internal contestation. In chapter ten Loera-González presents research in two indigenous communities in Mexico. With regard to the 'who and how' he reflects on the importance of his own positionality, and particularly the way he entered the village, in privileging some kinds of voices over others. Echoing other chapters, he emphasises the importance of ethnography and time spent simply being amongst people in enabling him to move beyond his initial presumptions and enabling different narratives to emerge. He emphasises how power is associated with different representations of wellbeing, as a strong narrative of social homogeneity and ethnic solidarity is enunciated by the elders, while younger, more socially marginal men stress economic hardship and their search for a better life in town. But he also makes clear how the politics of wellbeing narratives differ by place. In Mexican society more broadly it is the narrative of indigenous identity and difference that appears marginal, and the search for a more individualised wellbeing through the market the more authorised form.

The volume concludes with Rodríguez's reflection on her participatory research with the Pemon-Taurepan in Venezuela. Anxieties about the loss of identity triggered processes of community reflection that led ultimately to a reassertion of rights and visions of wellbeing and development. Here again the understanding of wellbeing as process is very strong. It was through the re-construction and recovery of community history that the Pemon-Taurepan were able to produce the book of their Life Plan, which expressed their vision of the future. However, this process was also difficult and conflictual: the doubts and hostility of one of the elders were only overcome when the book was finally published. Along with this sense of process, something shifting and twisting and happening in time, goes the awareness of politics. At its simplest, the energy behind producing the Life Plan ebbed and flowed according to

the political leadership. More significantly perhaps, the Life Plan was important to the Pemon-Taurepan both intrinsically – in recovering their sense of identity – and instrumentally – giving them a basis to negotiate with outsiders about property rights and resources. Whereas all the other chapters show the researchers as outsiders, Rodriguez entered at the invitation of the community because they saw she could be of use to them. This chapter thus draws the two base points of the triangle in Figure 1.1 very closely together: the researchers and researched are no longer distinct from one another, as the community is engaged in defining its own project of wellbeing.

[B] Conclusion: Wellbeing as a Field of Power

As wellbeing becomes a more accepted part of policy discourses, so the need to address wellbeing – for individuals, organisations, businesses, and government – becomes ever greater. This may have positive outcomes, with greater attention being paid to promoting the conditions which enable people to thrive. But it may also intensify self-monitoring, with greater pressure to produce and perform happiness or wellbeing as a marker of personal or collective value. To recognise this dilemma is to recognise wellbeing as a field of power.

This introductory chapter has set out four main ‘faces’ of wellbeing in public policy and four main concepts that underlie these. It has suggested some dimensions of the methodological complexities that attend the study of wellbeing, and outlined the chapters to come. It has suggested that the *subject* and what it means to be *subjective* remain radically under-theorised in the literature on subjective dimensions of wellbeing, and that relational wellbeing presents an important emerging approach.

Across the different contributions of this book, based in different places and reflecting on different areas of life, there are a number of common messages. The first is that wellbeing should not be seen as a ‘real thing’ that people may ‘have’, but that

constructions of wellbeing are intrinsically connected to the places in which they are produced, the people who present the account and the methods of data generation and analysis. This suggests the importance of modesty and methodological reflexivity, recognising the strengths and limitations of one's own approach, how the various methods are governed by specific assumptions, and being prepared to recognise the value in a quite different perspective. The second is that understandings of wellbeing vary across culture. The vision of wellbeing as a source of alternative policy and practice needs to be founded not on some comparative ranking against a single measure, but finding means to listen and discuss that can promote a genuine inter-personal and inter-cultural dialogue. The third is that the translation of wellbeing into policy is by no means straightforward, but carries a serious risk of co-option by anti-progressive forces, and being ransacked of all meaning so it simply becomes a performance to expectations. Underlying all these three points is an appreciation of wellbeing as a field of power.

In closing, I recall the words of Robert Serpell, Professor of Psychology at the University of Zambia, who pointed out to me how culturally specific is the aspiration for universality. For most people it is no problem to accept that their lives are lived in a particular form belonging to a specific context. It is a modern Western intellectual conceit to seek a framework that can comprehend the world.

[A] Notes

¹ This work is supported by the Economic and Social Research Council/Department for International Development Joint Scheme for Research on International Development (Poverty Alleviation) grant number RES-167-25-0507 ES/H033769/1.

² There is no discussion of the political implications of this. The analysis is also very thin. For Egypt and Tunisia for the years leading up to 2011 declines in scores on life satisfaction from the Gallup world poll are contrasted with rises in GDP. There is no mention, for example, of indices of inequality over the same period.

³ For many years the most commonly used measure was in fact Gross National Product (GNP) rather than Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Both are measures of national output and income, but GNP also includes the calculation of net income flows in and out of the country. For simplicity I just use the term GDP in this chapter, as the most commonly used measure in the wellbeing debates.

⁴ *Buen vivir* is the Spanish term. Other terms in indigenous languages include *suma qamaña* (Aymara) and *sumac kawsay* (Quechua).

⁵ The SWLS asks people to respond using a seven-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree to the statements: 'In most ways my life is close to my ideal'; the conditions of my life are excellent'; I am satisfied with my life'; so far I have gotten the important things I want in life'; 'if I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing' (Diener *et al.* 1985).

⁶ The PWI domains are: standard of living, personal health, achieving in life, personal relationships, personal safety, community-connectedness, future security, spirituality-religion (International Wellbeing Group 2013).

⁷ The source of this approach is Cantril's (1965) 'Self-anchoring striving scale'.

⁸ This is reinforced by Gallup's classification of responses into 'thriving', 'struggling' and 'suffering.'

⁹ Somewhat ironically, they also note, however, that experience sampling 'has never been applied to a representative population sample because it is burdensome' (Stiglitz *et al.* 2009: 147).

¹⁰ Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the

representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

¹¹ Ryff et al.'s domains are: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth.

¹² This includes figures such as Jahoda (1958), Maslow (1954), Allport (1961) and Rogers (1961).

¹³ It can also be reduced to 3 items per domain, but this is less reliable psychometrically, so not recommended.

¹⁴ Responses to this item would be reverse coded, so strong agreement would score as a negative wellbeing.

¹⁵ Sahlins (1976: 211) argues that in 'bourgeois society', 'economic symbolism is structurally determining.' Different kinds of society have different 'dominant sites of symbolic production' and in this case it is the economy (in others it might be religion, for example). This means that 'the cultural scheme is variously inflected by a dominant site of symbolic production, which supplies the major idiom of other relations and activities' (*ibid.*).

¹⁶ Atkinson references this point to Panelli and Tipa (2009).

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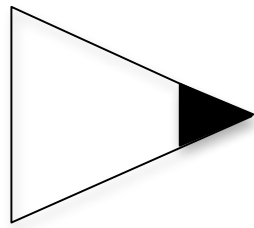
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Figure 1.1: The construction of wellbeing knowledge

Who and how: methodology



What: account of wellbeing

Where and with whom: context